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Selecting an Effective Tabletop Exercise Facilitator



Facilitators are a key element of successful tabletop exercises.

Facilitators guide exercise play and are responsible for ensuring that participant discussions remain focused on the exercise objectives and making sure all issues are explored as thoroughly as possible within available time.

Characteristics of a good facilitator include:

- Keeping discussions on track and within established time limits
- Controlling group dynamics and strong personalities
- Speaking competently and confidently about the subject without dominating the conversation
- Having subject-matter expertise or experience
- Having awareness of local plans and procedures
- Capturing key findings and discussion points during the exercise

A key facilitator role is to encourage all participants to contribute to the discussion, and to remind them that they are dealing with hypothetical situations in a no-fault environment. Facilitators also build and maintain an environment where all the participants feel comfortable speaking honestly and where differences of opinion are respected. Facilitators should ensure that everyone feels included in the conversation and has an opportunity to participate. Facilitators are not there to lecture or dominate the discussion, but rather to keep conversations

moving. Additionally, facilitators may want to use an issues list or “parking lot” to document valid points that are raised by participants during the exercise but that risk taking the conversation off topic.

Ideally, the facilitator will be someone who has both subject-matter knowledge and facilitation experience. If this is not possible, using an experienced facilitator who can keep the discussion on track is more important than specific subject-matter expertise.

On an administrative note, facilitators should discourage side conversations, ensure cellular phones are turned off or made silent, and control group dynamics. Table arrangements for the exercise should try to maximize the interaction between the facilitator and participants. During the exercise, facilitators need constantly to be aware of time constraints, notifying participants about progress and letting them know when time is running short.



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